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# SOIL CONSERVATION *and* WILDLIFE



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## SOIL CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE

**V**EGETATION is nature's own weapon against soil erosion. Man has found no better one. In all his efforts to conserve the soil, he must rely mainly on natural soil protections in the forms of trees and shrubs and grasses.

Creatures of the wild depend on vegetation for food and shelter. Any operation that improves or restores

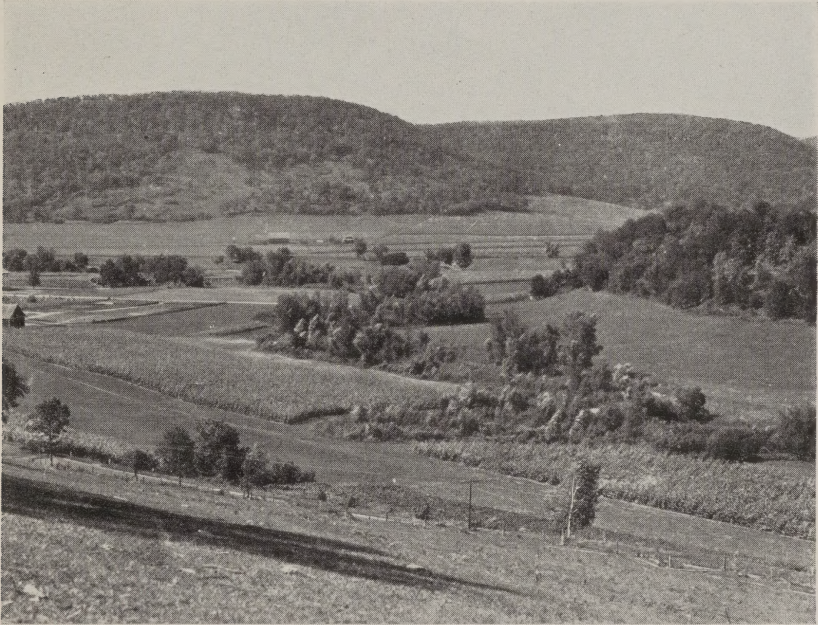


FIGURE 1.—Stream banks stabilized by vegetation supplying food and cover to wildlife.

vegetative growth is beneficial to wildlife. Soil conservation and wildlife conservation are inseparable because both involve the restoration of vegetative cover, in one case to protect the soil, in the other to protect and provide for animal life.

Soil-conservation activities under the Department of Agriculture present exceptional opportunities for promot-



ing wildlife welfare. The program of the Soil Conservation Service involves the extensive use of trees, shrubs, grasses, and legumes to protect denuded and eroding lands.

It is the purpose of the Department to integrate the principles of wildlife conservation in this program so that vegetation employed for soil conservation will serve at the same time to provide food and shelter for desirable birds and animals.

Soil conservation is essentially a matter of wise land use and sound farming. Wise land use prohibits the cultivation of steep, erodible slopes and dictates their main-



FIGURE 2.—Hobblebush (*Viburnum alnifolium*), a shrub useful for wildlife food and erosion control.

tenance in soil-protecting vegetation. Sound farming may call for the planting of gently sloping fields in strips, laid out on the contour, so that the close-growing crops, such as grass, clovers, and small grains, alternate with the clean-tilled row crops, such as corn, cotton, and tobacco. It calls also for the stabilization of gullies and the control of stream-bank cutting by plantings of vines and shrubs and trees which hold the soil.

Such land use and farming practices are of considerable importance in themselves from the standpoint of wildlife welfare. But in carrying out a national program of soil conservation in cooperation with individual farmers, the



Department is seeking to encourage the use wherever practicable, of erosion-control plantings which have distinct properties for providing food and shelter for wildlife (fig. 1).

In other words, it is the aim of the Department to establish wildlife conservation as a sound agricultural practice in connection with the conservation of soil and water resources. Every effort is being made to show farmers that the retirement of eroding lands to soil-conserving plants selected with a view to wildlife benefits can be made to



FIGURE 3.—Pheasants and quail at an emergency feeding station on a cooperator's farm.

provide an income to compensate either in whole or in part for the retirement of such lands from cultivation (fig. 2).

From the wildlife standpoint, the objectives of the Service are (1) to avoid acts detrimental to wildlife in controlling erosion; (2) to better conditions for wildlife as a whole, with due regard to its several values, biological as well as social; and (3) to develop an annual replaceable increment of game, fur bearers, and game fish, as a means

of providing supplemental farm income or compensation for lands taken out of agricultural production for the purposes of soil conservation (fig. 3).

Operations of the Soil Conservation Service now extend into 41 States and involve some 50 million acres of land. Most of the actual work is done in demonstration areas in cooperation with the owners of the land. These cooperative arrangements stipulate not only the nature of the soil-conservation program to be undertaken on the cooperator's farm but the nature of the wildlife-conservation work which will form a part of that program. Wildlife specialists of the Service staff, cooperating with the Bureau of Biological Survey, participate in the formation of each farm program within the demonstration areas to insure the integration of wildlife-preservation practices in the soil-conservation plan.

The continued development of a national soil-conservation program embracing the principles of wildlife protection and preservation should accomplish major benefits to wildlife and game resources. Such a program will affect thousands of farmers directly and will exert an educational influence on millions more. Eventually it should influence the use and treatment of a large part of the agricultural land of the country. The results obtained in less than 3 years, both from the standpoint of soil conservation and wildlife welfare, bear considerable promise for the future.

The creature of the wild depend no less than man himself on the produce of the soil. Vegetation is essential to the existence of man and bird and beast. The conservation of basic soil resources is as vital to wildlife as it is to humankind.





